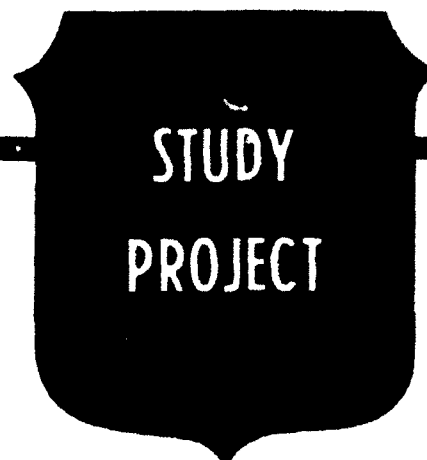
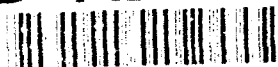


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**THE DIVISION COMMAND LESSONS
LEARNED PROGRAM: WHAT DIVISION
COMMANDERS CAN TEACH MID-LEVEL
OFFICERS ABOUT SUCCESS**

BY

COLONEL DENNIS L. CRIPPS
United States Army

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THE DIVISION COMMAND LESSONS LEARNED PROGRAM
WHAT DIVISION COMMANDERS CAN TEACH MID-LEVEL OFFICERS ABOUT
SUCCESS

AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

by

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United States Army

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U.S. Army War College
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ABSTRACT

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THE DIVISION COMMAND LESSONS LEARNED PROGRAM:
WHAT DIVISION COMMANDERS CAN TEACH MID-LEVEL OFFICERS ABOUT
SUCCESS

INTRODUCTION

In June 1984 the Chief of Staff of the United States Army directed the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations and Plans to capture specific lessons division commanders felt they had learned as they approached the end of their command tours. The Chief of Staff specified an interest in the areas of training, doctrine, organization, equipment, leadership, ethics, and family action issues. To support this objective the United States Army Military History Institute developed a program entitled Division Command Lessons Learned (DCLL). Selected students in the U.S. Army War College conduct the interviews as part of the Military Studies Program. Over time those responsible for the program added areas of interest: preparation for command, readiness, field operations, professional development and installation management. The program has resulted in a collection of interviews, spanning 1985 to the present, maintained in the Military History Institute archives. Because of the potentially sensitive nature of comments in individual transcripts and the non-attribution policy associated with the program, access to the transcripts is restricted.

Each year, the byproduct of the interviews has been a summary, Experiences in Division Command, using selected quotations from individual debriefings and transcripts. The comments

are not attributed to the author or to the division concerned. This program provides insights to precommand course attendees and the Army Staff.

PURPOSE

The current DCLL program provides information on experiences in command at the division level only to a very limited audience. DCLLs have not been used very extensively for other purposes such as obtaining a collection of common perceptions expressed by division commanders since the program began. Only a few secondary studies exist and they do not include specific citations. Access to the individual transcripts requires permission of the interviewee; the DCSOPS, U.S. Army; or the CG, USAMHI, as the executive agent for the DCSOPS.¹

The purpose of this paper is to expand the utility of the program by giving an officer with the rank of major an insight into what division commanders think. Specifically, the intent here is to offer advice to mid-rank officers, so they may chart a course to be more successful in their development. The comments here require judgement; this is not a manual that describes leadership doctrine such as the Field Manual 22 series. Although no general officer could offer a sure route for achieving division command, some insights can help in career development, and some of these can be found in the comments commanders made in their interviews.

The selected remarks germane to the topic of self-development were in the categories of leadership and professional devel-

opment, ethics, training, and doctrine. The other topics in the DCLL such as personnel, field operations, readiness, maintenance and family actions were not particularly applicable to this study for mid-level officers. The remainder of this paper treats the key areas in the order listed.

LEADERSHIP

When a lieutenant enters the basic branch school he or she is taught that a trained and ready Army has competent and confident leaders as its foundation. These leaders are developed through a dynamic process consisting of three equally important pillars: institutional training, operational assignments, and self-development.² By the time an officer is promoted to major he or she would have built the operational pillar by having had at least one company command and been a staff officer several times. Another of the pillars of the development process would have been fulfilled when the Advanced Course and Command and General Staff College were completed (institutional training).

The self-development pillar is a significant part of a division commander's officer professional development program most often referred to as the OPD program. All battalion commanders are required to brief their OPD programs to the division commander during their Quarterly Training Brief (QTB) and it is interesting to see how division commanders reflect on leadership in their divisions.

The first thing you have to do is to establish who is knowledgeable to conduct professional development classes. It is important to get battalion commanders to recognize that the most proficient company commander in that battalion is the

battalion commander himself because he has successfully commanded previously. Therefore, it is his duty to coach and to train the company commander. Similarly the brigade commander is, and ought to be, the best battalion commander because he has been carefully selected and he has demonstrated that he can command at task force level. Likewise, it is my duty as I see it to train the O-6 commanders in the division or coach them in terms of getting the division fit to fight.³

Throughout most of the interviews, general officers mentioned taking care of soldiers as a trait necessary for success and an essential part of the OPD process. One general said:

A lot of our professional development program is really keyed to leadership. I believe and I think most of my commanders now are sensitive to it but we find leaders that are not sensitive to taking care of soldiers. They don't know how to take care of soldiers. It may shock folks sometimes but I've watched and I've talked to junior leaders and I am convinced that some don't know how to take care of their groups. We have tried to develop some situations in our professional development program that will illustrate through case studies. "Here is a situation and how you go about doing it."⁴

Another reflected:

I have had company commanders and battalion commanders who were violating everything that I stand for in taking care of soldiers. Individuals who worked longer than was necessary in my opinion, kept soldiers at work when it was totally unnecessary. Individuals who always put their version of the mission before their soldiers and their family members[sic]. In some cases, it has to be done. I realize that, but in some cases it does not have to be done. As an example, I had an officer whom I had to take out of command because one of the things that he did, among others, was not to notify a soldier that he had an emergency. He neglected to tell the soldier that his grandmother had died because he felt the mission was more important. That is just not the right way to do business. We have had many officers, in spite of the kinds of things that I stand for, who have said and done things on their own accord totally different -- or used selected neglect. They had to be counseled or reprimanded for doing something that in my opinion was dumb.⁵

Some senior leaders found junior leaders lacking in understanding of their subordinates' duties. An officer has to

know what is expected of his people before he can adequately lead them. A comment in 1986, when it was believed that our junior leaders were not as effective as today, might apply equally well to some officers in 1993.

I found that my junior lieutenants -- by questioning an awful lot of people, even people a little higher up the chain -- did not really understand the duties and responsibilities of an NCO. I got quite a wide array of answers to my question of, "what the hell is an NCO supposed to do? What is he like?" I recall one day they said, "Well, he's like the foreman on a shop project." So, now I talk to and give every officer who joins the division an FM 22-600-20, the Duties and Roles of the Noncommissioned Officer.⁶

Since many functions of soldier actions have been institutionalized, numerous company and battalion leaders have neglected them. The perception of senior leaders is that younger leaders are not immersing themselves in the programs that support their soldiers. Several division commanders made comments such as:

If we concentrate all of our time on training per se and we ignore the personnel systems that support our people, then our people will pay a terrible price for that.

One of the not-so-surprising revelations made by division commanders was their concern for battalion commanders' leadership development. From a major's point of view, a battalion commander is the embodiment of independent command and direct leadership. Senior captains and junior majors know battalion command is the gate through which an officer must pass in order to be selected for higher rank. Division commanders recognize this and they concentrate their training on battalion commanders.

I know the kinds of leaders battalion commanders are going to have to be on the battlefield to succeed. So, there are certain things I just rule out for them. I say, "You are not going to operate out of your command post. You are not going to have the S-3 issue the orders to the battalion. You will be clearly the guy who's driving the train during field operations." I say it for a very positive and very clear reason: In the heat of battle, when everybody's scared to death, the Russians are coming, that's the time when soldiers need to hear the battalion commander's voice -- calm, steady, and firm, coming across the radio. So, it's not a question of can the S-3 do it as well. I say there are imperatives on the battlefield. So, I don't care how you manage your maintenance program, and I don't care how you get the meal card register right, but I damn sure care how you lead the battalion in battle. I want it to be personal; I want it to be visible; and I want it to be a reassuring and inspirational kind of leadership. So, if you aren't that way by inclination, then you start developing those skills in your day-to-day training, so that you get that way.⁸

The quotation above showed the emphasis this division commander put on demonstrating leadership on the battlefield. But how does one know if he or she can cope with the rigors of keeping their people under control to accomplish whatever it is they are required to do? Apparently, there is no easy way to find out before battle. In a study conducted at the U.S. Army War College, a student found that most of the reliefs of officers in Desert Shield/Storm were for lack of leadership (incompetence) or ethical behavior.⁹ For the mid-grade officer, the best test of leadership indicators is the Combat Training Centers (CTC). The stress endured at the National Training Center and Joint Readiness Training Center offers insight into the character of all who have experienced it. In the DCLLs from 1990 and later, division commanders spoke often of the value of observing their commanders under stress.

You can get a lot of subjective indicators. The easiest one, which also gets to performance, is the CMTC or the National Training Center. You can watch a commander under stress and watch his reaction and interaction with his subordinates. You can find some who have not developed their full potential yet. By that I mean the outcome may not be what they wanted or you wanted, but it is not a leadership problem. They just haven't worked it long enough. There are others who you can tell that they don't trust their subordinates. They are unwilling to let their subordinates succeed. They are uptight. They are not top block guys.¹⁰

In combat, as in the simulated battles, the commander has to put together everything he has been taught throughout his lifetime to lead his soldiers. Desert Storm provided an opportunity for a division commander to make this observation about commanders under the pressure of combat:

You have to watch him in a stressful tactical situation. You need to look at two key things. What kind of relationship does he have with his subordinates? It goes back to this trust, respect, and confidence thing. Is that a good relationship? Are all those guys pulling in the same direction? The answer to that question needs to be "yes." Then, technically and tactically, does he have a good sense and does he have a good intuition about what is happening to him?¹¹

Not surprisingly, one division commander compared division command to company command in combat by saying it differed only in perspective:

There is more in common between being a great company commander and a division commander than there are dissimilarities. The only clear difference is the distance you have to see out in front of you. That gets longer at each level of the chain of command and the techniques by which you implement your concept change and get more complicated. The bottom line is, get a notion of what you are doing, articulate the thing, and get moving.¹²

ETHICS

Ethical behavior by leaders is the cornerstone of the Army. In FM 22-103, Leadership and Command at Senior Levels, ethics is defined as principles that set the standard and the framework for correct professional action. Ethics serves as a link between the citizens you support and the people you lead. "In times of danger, the ethical element of leadership bonds soldiers and units together, enabling them to withstand the stresses of combat and ultimately gain victory."¹³ Soldiers depend on and have confidence in the decisions of their leaders. There is a link between trust and a soldier's acceptance of leadership. This concept is undisputed among the division commanders; however, it may be put to the test soon if homosexuals are permitted to serve and to have leadership positions.¹⁴

What this means is that defining ethical implications to mid-level officers is a difficult task, because their ethical expectations have already been established. So, it should not be surprising that some division commanders found that not every officer had the moral fiber to live up to high standards.

You either have integrity or you don't. You can't be a little dishonest. Officers need to know flat out that they are going to be held to that standard.

I had to relieve a commander over an ethical issue. I didn't want to. It hurt me worse than it did him. Of course, there was no way around it because he had compromised his ability to command.¹⁵

Each society, religion, and professional group, such as the military, has a standard of conduct. We rely on a body of

principles and moral precepts to guide our actions. Several division commanders spoke of consistent behavior as their measure of ethical behavior. In other words, what you do off duty is a reflection of what you are as a leader while on duty.

Many people may not personally subscribe to a leader's off-duty behavior, but they say, "Well, the good far outweighs the bad, and I would go to war with him and follow him to the death." The problem is that you can't run an Army that way, because in battle, you don't have time to get to know them. The company commander gets killed and Captain Smith walks up. Nobody knows Captain Smith; they don't know anything -- is he a good man, bad man, or whatever. Yet Smith is going to get them up off the ground to charge machine guns. Now, if they inherently believe that captains are good, honest, competent guys who would, under no circumstances, capriciously waste their lives, they'll probably get up off the ground and charge the machine guns. But, if their experience in dealing with officers is, "Hey, you've got to consider each one of these guys separately, because they're all different" -- then, we're in big trouble. You know, some of them are good, and some of them are bad. Some of them always tell you the truth, but some of them lie. Some of them are honest, but some of them are deceitful. That's the importance of ethics in the Army.¹⁶

Throughout the DCLL interviews it was easy to find what division commanders expected of their subordinates -- commanders, probably more so than staff officers. One might think that because most officers are trained alike, they would think alike; but some commanders did not believe that to be true.

It is necessary for a division commander to make very clear early on what his ethical standards are. I am continually bothered that we do have unethical people and they include officers. If you are as naive as I was about [unethical officers being in the military], go tell people what you expect from them [ethically] so they all know what the rules are going into the game. Then you must enforce your standards.¹⁷

Another division commander personally scrutinized his commanders.

Every commander that works for me has to pass an oral

examination that has two questions and they must make 100 percent on the exam or they must disassociate themselves from the unit. The first question is a very simple one, it says, "Can I count on you to be who you are, a person worthy of a special trust and confidence that I must place in you, and can I count on you to do the things you know you ought to do, even when no one is watching, knowing that you never change who you are, where you are, or what you might be doing?" If his answer to that is yes, then the second question is: "Even after you have done what you know is right, you will sometimes find that things go to hell in a handbasket and when you find that things are all screwed up, can I count on you to report the bad news promptly and accurately as you perceive it to your boss?"¹⁸

The key point for mid-level officers is that they should never lose focus on what they believe to be ethical behavior. One of the simplest statements about ethics from a division commander was:

I tell my commanders that if they're doing something they don't want to read about in the newspapers, they better not do it.¹⁹

Another described ethical behavior this way:

Warriors don't lie, cheat or steal. That's something you have to preserve. You have to live it and you have to set the example. You also have to create a climate to maintain that warrior ethic.²⁰

TRAINING

Training was the topic division commanders enjoyed discussing most. More words were recorded on that subject than on any of the others. Since the Division Command Lessons Learned program started, the method of training management has changed. Some of the terms have been adjusted to the latest in doctrine but the meanings have not varied much. For the mid-level officer, training management is the most common form of work

performed at division level and the number one priority for most of the commanders. It is, therefore, essential that the mid-level officer understand all aspects to achieve selection to higher level commands. The excerpts for this section will be only those which give particular insight for potential battalion and brigade level officers.

Consistently, division commanders praised the Combat Training Centers (CTC) and Battle Command Training Program (BCTP), because these gave them the opportunity to synchronize battlefield operating systems properly. For years, many junior officers were unaware of the significance of timing on the battlefield because some of the major battlefield operating systems could not be realistically phased into the training area. Instead they were only played conceptually. Likewise, whole units of a division could not be blended into the scheme of maneuver until the training centers had been established and BCTP was used by the division staff.

Mid-level officers need to spend time -- lots of it -- at the training centers. These are the best tests available, short of combat, to see how people react under pressure and to see if doctrine is understood. Three different division commanders had this to say:

There is a high probability that if a battalion commander starts at NTC, it will be an absolute disaster. But, by the time he comes out of the last fight and into the dust bowl, he's a hero. I say I am developing a leader; I've got a synchronizer; and I have a well trained battalion commander. If I have a battalion commander who starts off poor and stays poor all the way, or shows no improvement, or even starts off marginal and stays marginal, then he probably

will not be successful in combat. He is not adapting to the tempo of warfighting. If a battalion commander can do well at the NTC, he'll do well in battle. Doing well means that he and his battalion continue to improve and become more proficient every day at the NTC. The NTC is a strain on your leadership ability; it is a real stress. But, most guys enjoy it and do well.²¹

CMTC is dynamite. In Europe CMTC is a division commander's training device; he uses it to train his battalions and brigades.²²

The Combat Training Centers have really allowed us to take a hard look at ourselves and try to improve. The fact is that most of our people want to be measured against the best standard we can put together and if you don't just run around firing everybody because they don't meet the standard every time and you begin to get the attitude in the Army that, by God, the next time I come back here I'm going to do better and this really is important stuff.²³

Obviously, if division commanders believe the CTC's to be the best training, then it would benefit mid-grade officers to request positions which give them the best opportunities to attend them.

DOCTRINE

The value of the training centers is best seen in learning doctrine -- the last topic of significance to the mid-level officer. Of great importance to senior level officers is the study of AirLand Battle doctrine. Most division commanders said they were satisfied with the doctrine and they often mentioned how important it was for young officers to know it well.

I think it is important that you get young officers to thinking about doctrine at the higher levels so that they better understand how their particular piece of the action fits in the overall scheme of things.²⁴

The bottom line is that we have a superb doctrine in AirLand Battle. It takes our enormous technological advantage over

any other army in the world and capitalizes on it instead of capitalizing on brute strength. Our doctrine was so effective and widely understood that it was more important to us in the DESERT STORM victory than was the Bradley, the Apache, and the tank. If I had to give up one of the two, I would have kept the doctrine.²⁵

Several division commanders spoke about their concern that not all their field grade officers knew doctrine adequately.

One of the things that has really changed in the Army, at least heavy Army, is the focus at brigade. The focus on brigade operations out at the NTC has identified weaknesses in brigade staffs and brigade commanders. We had a brigade that went through the NTC a little over a year ago. The brigade commander was almost incompetent. I say incompetent, but I really shouldn't say incompetent. He was not current. He was also out-of-date doctrinally.²⁶

Many division commanders expressed the need to be current in doctrine. Several said that they had to know the latest information from the schools and that they studied it constantly to maintain the language of warfare, so they could teach it in their divisions.

You have to know the doctrine. The school systems certainly teach that. As you get into your warfighting sessions in your division, the division commander has to provide that mature understanding of doctrine, and it is helpful to occasionally get into those doctrinal discussions with your senior leaders -- your battalion and brigade commanders -- to put some of the tactical rubs or the tactical disagreements in context with the doctrine.²⁷

Read it as much as you can. Get the latest book. Figure out where the Army is headed. The best advice I can give anybody is that you have to read what is there.²⁸

Although these comments were in response to questions to assist new division commanders, they are helpful to the mid-level officer in charting learning objectives. Every officer at every level must understand the basic principles.

Every opportunity you have, you must study doctrine. You can't get away from it, it's a way of life. The guy who doesn't is only one-level deep. You have to get 10 levels deep. You have to be able to understand it in order to teach it. Commanders are teachers of doctrine. To be a teacher you have to understand the inner workings of the doctrine of what you are teaching.²⁹

We brought people down from the schools. We had the Air Defenders come in and we had the schools come in on this warfighters and talk to us. The aviation. We would have the battalion commander or the brigade commander get up and talk about doctrinal employment of the attack battalion. The school would have a member from the school there and they would reinforce what he had said or bring out the doctrinal change of some such.³⁰

Most division commanders were proud of the way they continued the education of the officers in their division with respect to the doctrine as it applied to their mission. One of the best opportunities to reflect and refine the tactics, techniques and procedures was during back briefs and after action reviews while getting prepared for BCTP's and practices for training centers.

You have to teach doctrine all the time. You go to AARs, you start off with the doctrine. What was the doctrinal base? What was the tactic, technique, and procedure about that we just did? Did we follow it? If we deviated, why did we deviate and what caused us to deviate? So every opportunity you get, you have to be able to get into the doctrinal base. Commanders have to lead from the front.³¹

The lesson for the mid-level officer is that division commanders expect the best officers to know their doctrine and be able to apply it to all their training.

CONCLUSION

As the Army is being distilled by large reductions, a mid-grade officer has a precarious journey for selection to Colonel

and brigade command. Obviously, it is those two milestones that usually determine if higher grades are achieved. At the beginning of this paper it was stated there is no sure map to the top levels of the Army. Still, there are some characteristics that most of today's military leaders share. They would agree that a strong foundation obtained through experience in leadership, training and doctrine, and a morally sound ethical personality is the minimum to be successful.

Throughout all the DCLL interviews recurred a theme of reading, reading and more reading. Most division commanders advised studying and dissecting FM 25-100 and 25-101. They advised this while knowing the questions asked were for future division commanders. A mid-level officer can draw from this that they, too, should digest those publications.

In preparing this paper, I have asked a division commander for particular insights to offer mid-level officers. First, I specifically asked him if having a mentor is helpful for achieving high level rank. Replies tell me it is a myth that successful officers have a mentor to pull them up the ladder of success; it is not particularly helpful to follow a successful senior officer around.

Battalion command is the most important job officers should strive to get. If they seek the sort of work which makes them well qualified in their branch, they will be selected for battalion command. Most young officers remember their first battalion commander and it is he who makes the greatest impact on

them. Do not worry about the "big events" like Desert Storm, Panama, Grenada and Vietnam. Doing well in the positions held should be the most important concern for an officer. Luck helps but it is not everything. Be prepared to make sacrifices for pursuing the hard jobs. An officer's family often pays the price. Few general officers believe their families have not suffered in some ways for their success.

ENDNOTES

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